

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

SOME INTERESTING ESSAYS.

IN THE KEY OF BLUE, and Other Prose Essays. By John Addington Symonds. 12mo, pp. 362. Macmillan & Co.

These essays by Mr. Symonds cover a wide range, both of years and topics. With few exceptions they are fresh and interesting. The juvenile essay which has been inserted may very well have been a weakness with the author, but the critical pieces are full of that mental alertness and ripe judgment for which he has won a well-deserved reputation. Above all we find here strong evidence of the aesthetic effect of the open-air life in a classical and picturesque region which for many years has colored all Mr. Symonds' work in one way and another. Driven by the state of his health to a mountainous country, and obliged to continue his residence there for many years, he has gradually absorbed the local influences, the atmospheric effects, until they are unconsciously reflected in his work, and the result for the reader is a breeziness, a freshness, and a bracing tone, which are alike unusual and refreshing.

The opening paper, "In the Key of Blue," is a curious but by no means unattractive endeavor to represent in poetry some of the more striking Venetian light and color effects as represented by popular costume and scenery. The verses are commonly thrown into the sonnet form, and not a few of them are marked by a distinct ability in the dramatic form, and the effort at portraiture involved. The work does not pretend to be anything but light. It is the intellectual pastime, however, of an author who has accomplished important work in his mountain solitude, and who has triumphed over the frailties of the body by rigid physical regimen in quite a surprising manner.

Another curious paper in the book is that entitled "The Dantesque and Platonic Ideals of Love." As regards his views of the latter, Mr. Symonds sets himself in opposition to the recorded opinion of the ancient Greeks themselves, though it must not therefore be taken for granted that he is wrong and that they are right. The position he takes is, indeed, not one with which the modern world is familiar, but there is not a little to be said in support of it, and if his premises are granted the weight of probability must, by candid minds, be admitted to lie in his favor. The gist of the new suggestion may be briefly outlined. It is to the effect that the so-called Platonic love and the much later love known as that of Chivalry, alike had their springs, not as the world maliciously insinuated, in perverted and degrading ideas, but in ideas so far above the conception of the common herd that the latter could do nothing but misrepresent and travesty the subject.

Certainly the Platonic love, as dealt with by Plato and his immediate followers, cannot be said to have anything in common with the gross notions which came to be associated with the question. Not less certainly the love of Chivalry, however imperfectly developed in actual practice, was, above all, an inspiration, and on the same general lines with the Platonic love. This, of course, is the most difficult point in the discussion. The world has through so many centuries looked at both these things through a single, narrow, distorting glass, that it is scarcely possible at present to realize that the mediaeval views may, after all, have been tinged and discolored by the ignorance which hung like a pall over all human society in those ages. Moreover, the final convulsions of expiring Chivalry were so exposed to ridicule by Cervantes that it is hard to retain belief in the earlier seriousness of the things which, in their decadence, were destined to take on so absurd an appearance.

Nevertheless, we know that in the days when chivalry flourished there was a great and high spirit pervading it. It really did at one time represent the best efforts of a certain class to rise into a higher life. It was in its inception an endeavor to apply Christian ethics upon the rougher parts of the existing civilization. In its attitude toward Woman, it was altogether pure and noble and elevating. The world had seen nothing like that attitude before, and the idea struck deep, and even though ultimately lost, it unquestionably served an important purpose in furthering the best interests of civilization. It is possible to say so much with very little hesitation; but it is not so easy to deal with Platonic love, much as that left. Woman out of the question wholly. It might indeed be said—and Mr. Symonds comes near saying it—that Platonic love was in truth a purely spiritual design, aimed at the elevation of men's souls, and having really no relation to what is commonly called love.

That these no doubt is capable of being held and developed, but while there may be a deep truth at the bottom of it, we do not think Mr. Symonds has attained sufficient conviction himself to undertake its advocacy "con amore." After all, the old Greek experiment, if we assume, with this author, that it was pure and well-intended, does not inspire the warmth of sympathy. It strikes one as too wholly an intellectual effort to be called by the name of love at all, and the fact that it took no lasting hold upon men's minds in the days when it was practised, seems to be accounted for by its inherent aloofness from those human feelings which dominate life and mould society. In the Middle Ages the Dantean chivalry was much more effective, and precisely because it took strong hold upon existing predispositions and affections. In its inception it was no doubt not less pure and free from fleshly taint than the Greek ideal. But it speedily fell into the slough of manner, as the old celibates used to put it, and became deformed, or rather conformed to ungenerous ways, and was eventually lost and buried in the advancing waves of a newer civilization.

The whole subject is full of interest, for the question is of human efforts to improve and reform society at widely separated epochs. Mr. Symonds has done little more than glance at it in his interesting essay, but it could be wished that either he or some other some patient scholar would devote a serious work to the exploitation of the whole subject.

A GLIMPSE OF THACKERAY.

G. A. Sola in the London Telegraph.

It was on a Sunday morning that the novelist made his appearance, followed by a host of admirers.

At the corner of Broad and Newgate Streets, he was well known in literary and, I dare say, in fashionable circles, but by the public at large he was almost entirely ignored. A wonderful change in a course of very short time, and that in his favor!

He had become famous as the author of "Vandy Fair," and he had begun "Penitentiary."

His hair by this time was nearly white, and yet he was barely forty. I had just been published, and I met him, in reply, that I had not the advantage to be the begetter of the pseudonym in question, and that the very clever draughtman known as "Luke Lummer" was a Mr. John Leighton. Then I conducted Thackeray to his lodgings, and when I reminded him that I had met him when I was quite a lad he smilingly recalled the occasion, spoke with approval of the book of sketches which he had just shown me, and asked me to call again. I did so, and he invited me to his room, in reply, that I had not the advantage to be the begetter of the pseudonym in question, and that the very clever draughtman known as "Luke Lummer" was a Mr. John Leighton. Then I conducted Thackeray to his lodgings, and when I reminded him that I had met him when I was quite a lad he smilingly recalled the occasion, spoke with approval of the book of sketches which he had just shown me, and asked me to call again. 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